

# Involving Volunteers Toolkit

## Supporting your Volunteers

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### Get to know your volunteers

It is important to really get to know your volunteers. This means taking time to understand what they find satisfying about volunteering and any concerns they may have about the role or the organisation. Volunteers do get bored; they have other things going on in their lives.

A manager of volunteers may be coordinating several hundred volunteers so finding the time to talk to each individual or group may be difficult. However, ensuring volunteers are given opportunities for giving and receiving feedback on their work is essential. Exit interviews are particularly helpful in this respect.

Understanding your volunteers will help you to:

- revise roles to ensure they are still relevant and valuable.
- provide new opportunities for keeping volunteers involved and motivated.
- enable you to continually improve how volunteers are organised.

### Why is support needed?

Support and supervision is needed for all volunteers to:

- Allow you to view their concerns and ideas.
- Give and receive feedback.
- Make sure that the roles fulfil their motivations and that they are happy.
- Allow volunteers to progress.
- Assure that they are doing the right thing.
- Solve any problems that may arise.
- Help you to manage volunteers.
- Help you to avoid any problems and resolve them if they arise.
- Help you to make sure that all your policies and procedures are being followed.

The method that you choose will depend on the role and the individual volunteer. Different types of people need different type of support. It is also a good idea to ask your volunteers if they need a certain kind of support (peer support, group, etc.) They may have brilliant ideas!

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### Identifying methods of support for volunteers

#### Induction

This is the first step in supporting volunteers. The basic elements of induction are:

- Information about the organisation.
- Where will they be based?
- Staff and other volunteers.
- The role they will be fulfilling and what they will be doing.
- Who will be the person who gives them regular support (possibly a named supervisor)?

#### Informal Support

On the job informal chats, get-togethers, social events, etc are a vital form of regular support. For larger organisations, a more formal method of support would be valuable. It is also worth smaller groups to consider having a one-to-one session with each volunteer from time to time to ensure that there is an opportunity for issues to be raised, away from other people.

#### One-to-one with a named supervisor

It is important that the volunteer knows exactly who they need to turn to should they have any questions. The person should be named at the induction and ideally be introduced at that stage.

#### Peer to peer support

This enables an existing volunteer to support a new one. This is not only positive for the new volunteer but also to the existing one who gains a more responsible role.

#### Volunteer Meetings

You can encourage your volunteers to meet regularly as a group to discuss projects, their involvement and to share ideas on development.

#### Group Meetings

Volunteers would be able to chat to a supervisor or a member of staff in a group setting.

### Developing your volunteers

Volunteers can develop formally and informally in your organisation.

#### Informal Development

This can be achieved when a volunteer fulfils his or her motivation/s. They may gain confidence, friends, and fulfilment; acquire new skills and much more. To make sure their development is ongoing it is good to review their motivations and needs at the regular support sessions (see above). Another aspect of the informal development is 'on the job' learning and getting new experience.

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### Formal Development

Training could be provided to volunteers based on individual needs. To establish the right kind of training think of what information, skills and attitudes volunteers need to successfully perform their tasks?

### Celebrating your volunteers

Ground rules for making recognition effective:

It must be:

- Given at the right time.
- Given frequently.
- Honest.
- Given to the person, not to the role.
- Appropriate to the achievement.
- Consistent – with past praise, with praise to others.
- Individualised as much as possible.
- Paying attention to what you want more of.

### Everyday ways of recognising volunteers

- Saying "thank you" or writing thank you notes.
- Including them in socialising.
- Taking time to listen and talk to them.
- Involving them in decision making.
- Enabling them to grow "on the job."
- Showing interest in their personal life.
- Having a volunteer suggestion box.
- Reimbursing expenses promptly.
- Maintaining a folder of accomplishments.
- Bringing food to a volunteer meeting.
- Ask them to present their ideas at a meeting.
- Celebrate their birthday.
- Invite them to join an important project.
- Celebrate major achievements.

### Special ways of recognising volunteers

- Invite them to major conferences, training events etc.
- Nominate them for local and national volunteer awards.
- Honouring them for years of service
- Inviting them to train or manage or support others.
- Giving them a new role